

included broken bowls and stems of early clay pipes, and a number of brown polished stone marbles, lost no doubt by a child.

Old barns and outhouses at the side and rear of Durlock Grange make it clear that it had been used as a farm-house for at least four centuries.

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2. A DESTROYED TIMBER HOUSE AT DARENTH

By P. J. TESTER, F.S.A.

THE small timber-framed house described in this note stood on the south side of Parsonage Lane, close to the bridge over the Darent stream.¹ It was pulled down together with some adjoining brick cottages in 1961, but I had the opportunity of recording its features of interest shortly before this took place.

In general it could be regarded as an interesting example of late timber-framed construction in the medieval and Tudor tradition, though clearly distinguishable from the common hall-house type and probably of seventeenth-century age.

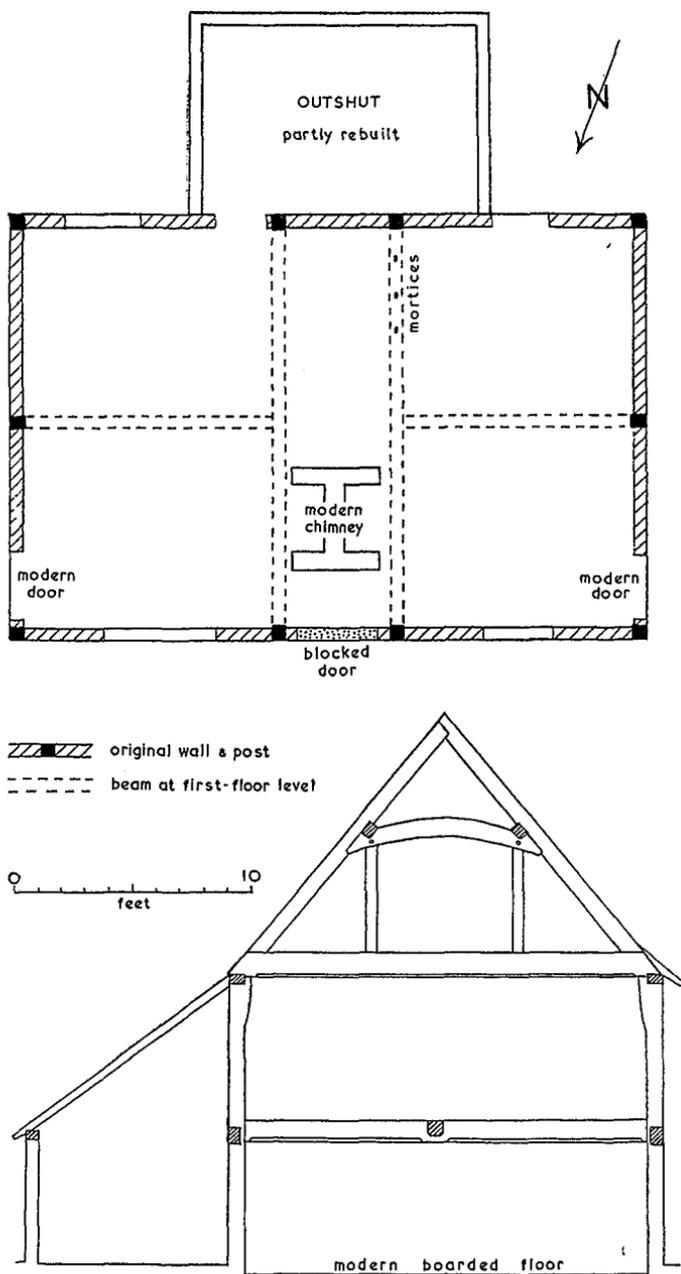
The introduction of chimneys in poorer class homes in the Elizabethan period rendered the traditional lofty hall with its open hearth no longer necessary. Such halls were consequently divided by the insertion of an upper floor, with the new brick chimney frequently occupying part of the narrow entry passage. Subsequently, when new houses were built, the wide chimney was often made to stand in the middle of the house, forming in itself a division between the two main living rooms. The Darent house belonged to this class and originally comprised two ground-floor rooms with a continuous upper storey. Attached to the south side was a lean-to addition, or outshut, which showed evidence of having been part of the house in its early form.

In the accompanying plan—which is simplified by the omission of some later features—the positions of the ten wall-posts are indicated (Fig. 1). These were spaced so as to divide the house into three structural bays, the central one being much narrower than those at the ends. The narrow bay was evidently intended to accommodate the central chimney, and the main entrance was situated at its north end, roughly mid-way along the front of the house.² This was in accordance with the tradition of the converted hall-houses where, as noted, the

¹ National Grid Reference TQ 55907128. O.S. 6 in. Kent Sheet IX, S.E.

² Part of the actual door could be seen, still in position, from inside, though the exterior had been plastered over.

THE VANISHING HOUSES OF KENT



P.J. Tester 1961

FIG. 1. Timber House at Darenth.

THE VANISHING HOUSES OF KENT

inserted chimney was commonly sited in the entry passage opposite the main door.

The inner trusses were both of the form shown in the drawing, revealing the familiar features of early timber construction, with tie-beam, queen posts, collar and purlins. The roof timbers were very rough and some retained patches of bark. Wind-braces occurred in the angles between the principal rafters and the purlins.

In the nineteenth century the house had been divided into two cottages, at which time the old chimney was replaced by a smaller one, shown on the plan. The older chimney had stood centrally under the ridge, as clearly shown by the way the rafters were trimmed to butt against its sides.

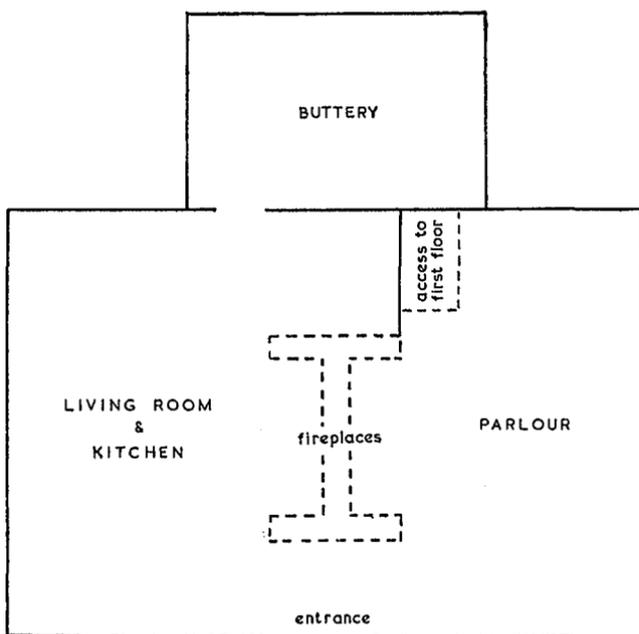


FIG. 2 Probable arrangement of the Darenth house as originally constructed.

The upper floor was carried on four beams, as shown. They were chamfered on the lower edges as were the joists, and the work was carefully finished. Examination of the under-sides revealed mortices marking the line of a former partition. Immediately adjoining, one of the joists had been trimmed in antiquity to leave an opening in the upper floor measuring 2 ft. 3 in. by 3 ft. 8 in., and most probably this was where a ladder was originally placed to give access to the upper

THE VANISHING HOUSES OF KENT

storey.¹ The existing deal stairs (omitted from the plan) were obviously of recent origin, constructed in the S.E. and S.W. corners of the house after its conversion into two dwellings. Of the four doorways indicated—apart from the blocked central door—only those on the south side were likely to have been pre-nineteenth century. Although the windows shown bore no visible signs of early work it is probable that they were in the same positions as the original openings.

Fig. 2 shows the probable layout of the house as first constructed, the wide fireplaces, together with the short stud wall attested by the mortices, separating the two main rooms. Research has shown that in houses of this type the chief living room was also used as a kitchen and that the parlour served as the main bedroom. First-floor chambers in humble houses were frequently store places, and the rough timbering and primitive access in the Darenth house accords with this interpretation.² By this period the buttery had apparently lost its customary medieval position next to the entry passage, and now took the form of a lateral structure covered by an extension of the main roof.

As shown in the photograph, the timbering was entirely covered externally by plaster rendering, and no evidence of wattle and daub filling between the studs was observed. Where these were visible they appeared to be placed about a foot apart, with riven laths nailed across them to hold the plaster facing. In places where this had fallen away the studs were seen to be poorly shaped and of inferior material.

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¹ A more usual arrangement would have been a stair between the fireplace and the S. wall, but I was unable to discover any trace of this in the Darenth house. See *The Timber Framed Houses of Essex* by H. Forrester (1960), pp. 15-16.

² This and many other interesting facts concerning the occupation of such houses are given in *The English Farmhouse and Cottage* (1961) by M. B. Barley.